

of service. They are a blessing to our community.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HULTGREN). The Chair will entertain up to 15 further requests for 1-minute speeches on each side.

BACKLOG AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

(Mr. BOEHNER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, I know that the House shares my deep concern over the backlog of benefit claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

It is nothing short of a black eye for our government. This country has made promises that it is our duty to keep, and the House has acted to tackle this problem.

Even so, reform won't get very far if it is carried out by managers who have proven that they are not up to the job. So we recently introduced H.R. 4031, the VA Management Accountability Act. This measure gives the VA Secretary the authority to fire and demote officials who aren't performing.

The principle here is simple. When you are not getting the job done, you have got to go. At the VA, it has been quite the opposite. For all the incompetence we have seen and all the lives that have been lost, the evidence shows there has been no accountability. Only half-measures and little slaps on the wrist.

At any agency that has fallen down on the job this would be unacceptable. But to have it happen in the health care system for America's veterans? I think it is shameful.

The VA is failing our veterans and their families. It is time we hold these people accountable and get people in there who can fix this backlog once and for all.

I am going to applaud Chairman MILLER and the Veterans Affairs' Committee for their leadership. I am pleased this legislation has already picked up the support of several veterans' organizations. I would urge all of my colleagues to back this critical measure.

HONORING THE MEMORY OF RALPH WILSON

(Mr. HIGGINS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mourn the passing of Ralph Wilson. Wilson is best known in my western New York community as the founder and owner of the Buffalo Bills for a remarkable 55-year tenure. He was a savvy businessman and true lover of the game of football.

I remember Mr. Wilson calling me to his office to discuss his concerns about the new NFL collective bargaining agreement. He believed that agreement was stacked against smaller market teams like Buffalo, and I found him to have a better command of the details than anyone on the subject. He was passionate not only about his beloved Buffalo Bills, but about its place in our community as well.

Mr. Wilson's interest in our community did not stop at football. His foundation donated over \$11 million in the past two decades, including to the Roswell Park Cancer Institute, the community food banks, and the Hospice Foundation of Western New York.

Mr. Speaker, we are forever grateful for Mr. Wilson's dedication to western New York and to our Nation as a World War II veteran. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends during this difficult time.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK

(Mr. SMITH of Nebraska asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize National Agriculture Week. It is a time to celebrate the extraordinary diversity, abundance, and evolution of American agriculture.

In 1960, the average U.S. farmer fed 26 people; today, Mr. Speaker, the average U.S. farmer feeds 155 people by using less land, less water, less energy, and less fertilizer.

Thanks to agriculture research which has given rise to new technologies and techniques, America's producers are adopting practices which allow them to meet food, fiber, feed, and fuel demands and preserve our natural resources for generations to come. From high-tech irrigation tools to biotechnology, growers are producing a more stable, safe, quality, and affordable food supply.

As we recognize National Agriculture Week, we have much to celebrate but many challenges ahead. Knowing the forward-thinking nature of producers, combined with these exciting advances in agriculture, I am confident we will meet all of the demands of our growing world.

As cochair of the Modern Agriculture Caucus and the rural caucus, I am committed to ensuring Federal policy reflects sound science and strives to complement, not undermine, this innovation.

LET'S PASS COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

(Mr. HIMES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HIMES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today because today the Democrats will present a discharge petition to force a vote in this House on something that so many Americans know to be abso-

lutely essential, which is comprehensive immigration reform.

The Senate has weighed in with 78 "yes" votes. This is a Senate where you don't get 78 votes for just about anything—bipartisan support for comprehensive immigration reform.

The reason I rise today, Mr. Speaker, is because yesterday in Financial Services we had a very interesting hearing on why debt matters. We talked a lot about what we need to do to continue to put our country on a sustainable path and to help this recovery be stronger.

We had David Cote, CEO of Honeywell; Alice Rivlin of Brookings; Doug Holtz-Eakin of the American Action Forum; and Jared Bernstein from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. They agreed on one thing enthusiastically: that one of the most important steps we can take to spur growth in our economy, and to help our fiscal situation and balance our budget, would be to pass comprehensive immigration reform. The Senate has done so. It is time for this House to do the same and stand up for the economy and American families.

GOOD LUCK, DAYTON FLYERS

(Mr. TURNER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, as a proud alumnus of the University of Dayton, I am here today to wish good luck to the Dayton Flyers.

The University of Dayton men's basketball team has advanced to the NCAA tournament's Sweet 16 for the first time in 30 years. The Dayton Flyers are the only team this season to have upset two top 25 teams in the second and third rounds of the NCAA tournament.

But the city of Dayton has a history of being underestimated. Orville and Wilbur Wright started working on their so-called "flying machine" in a Dayton garage. As we all know, these pioneers of aviation went on to complete the first manned flight, transforming the way we travel and engage in commerce.

It is fitting that the University of Dayton bears the Flyer name in honor of the Dayton tradition of succeeding despite all odds.

Congratulations to the Dayton Flyers and Coach Archie Miller. You have a vast fan base of students, faculty, and alumni throughout the country who will be cheering you on tomorrow night.

ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR WOMEN

(Ms. HAHN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. HAHN. Mr. Speaker, far too many women face financial pressures simply due to outdated policies that hamper their opportunities for success.

I recently hosted an event in Los Angeles with Congresswoman ROYBAL-

ALLARD and Congresswoman NAPOLITANO to discuss women's economic agenda. Over 200 women showed up to talk about this.

We heard from women like Sonia and Caryn. Sonia has been a hotel worker for 9 years, barely making it on minimum wage, while balancing her work with the needs of her three young sons. Without paid medical and family leave through her employer, whenever one of her boys was sick, she had to stay home without pay.

For mothers like Sonia, we must increase the minimum wage and ensure employers provide paid family and medical leave for all of our families.

Caryn's life has turned around after she was finally able to access affordable child care in San Pedro, after struggling to balance taking care of her daughter as a single mom and building a future. Because of that she has already earned an associate's degree and is now studying for her bachelor's degree.

The success of our Nation relies upon the economic security of these women because when women succeed, America succeeds.

FOUR YEARS AND OBAMACARE IS STILL FAILING

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, according to an institute at the University of New Hampshire, the number of long-term unemployed Americans has more than doubled since 2007, to a gruesome 39.3 percent.

The President has had more than enough time to get our weak economy back on track. Instead of working with Congress on pro-growth reforms to our tax system and encouraging businesses to hire more workers, he has focused his attention on implementing his disastrous health care takeover, destroying jobs.

American families have felt the duplicity of the "Unaffordable Care Act." They have lost health care plans. They have been forced to pay higher insurance premiums and receive smaller paychecks due to reduction in work hours.

A key to economic recovery starts with repealing and replacing the takeover with a commonsense, patient-centered solution. Our workforce should not lose 2.5 million more jobs because of government mandates. We must work together to promote jobs.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September the 11th in the global war on terrorism.

NATIONAL LIHEAP ACTION DAY

(Mr. KILDEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. KILDEE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about a critical Federal

program that helps seniors and low-income families in Michigan and across the country with their utility bills.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, LIHEAP, provides short-term assistance to help households with their heating costs in the winter and cooling costs in the summer. In Michigan, more than 600,000 households received LIHEAP assistance last year. Nationally, LIHEAP serves 6.7 million people.

These mostly one-time payments provide a financial bridge to ensure that vulnerable populations do not have to choose between paying their energy bills and affording the other necessities of life, like food and medicine.

Today is National LIHEAP Action Day, and constituents, businesses, and nonprofit organizations are all in town to ask Congress to provide adequate funding so residents across the country are able to continue accessing this vital program. Please welcome them into your offices, and please support the critical LIHEAP program.

With this year being one of the coldest winters in decades, many agencies are struggling with record numbers of people seeking assistance. LIHEAP benefits have already been cut; it is not time to cut them again.

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HONORING ILLINOIS ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR SHERYL GRAY

(Mr. HULTGREN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HULTGREN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize a caring and innovative educational leader from Illinois' 14th Congressional District.

For her hard work, Sheryl Gray was named Illinois Assistant Principal of the Year by the Illinois Principals Association.

Since she began at Prairie Trail School in Wadsworth, she has created and implemented fresh ideas that bring together students and their families in education.

Her brainchild Partnership and Achievement Lead to Success, or PALS, has been extremely successful in educating and empowering at-risk children. She has also devoted her time to improving Prairie Trail School's special education program and increasing school attendance by supporting families who are in need.

A servant to the Lake County community, Sheryl Gray is an inspiration to her students and to the next generation of educators.

With more leaders like Sheryl in schools, all of our children will be able to reach their true potential.

RAISE THE WAGE

(Mr. YARMUTH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. YARMUTH. Madam Speaker, during the past 40 years, we have made tremendous progress in America technologically, medically, socially, and—for many of our citizens—economically, but not if you are a family trying to get by on the minimum wage.

In real value, today's Federal minimum wage is about 30 percent below the days when President Ford pardoned Richard Nixon and Cannonade won the Kentucky Derby.

As American productivity has surged, the economic status of the American worker has weakened and, along with it, the capacity of American consumers to continue driving our economy.

Even Walmart executives have admitted an obvious cause and effect. When their employees can't afford to shop in their stores, profits will suffer.

Madam Speaker, a fair minimum wage has the power to make work pay a little better, to give families a shot at a stronger future, and to grow our economy substantially.

It is a corrective to obscene corporate welfare, whereby American taxpayers must support low wage workers when their employers don't.

It reaffirms the basic American idea that, if you put in 40 hours a week, you should be able to put food on your family's table every day.

PARALYMPIC CHAMPION EVAN STRONG

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I rise before you today to honor Evan Strong in celebration of his continued achievements in the 2014 Sochi Paralympic Winter Games.

Bordering the Tahoe National Forest, Nevada City is home to 3,000 people, including Evan and his wife, Mariah. Today, I join the members of that community in recognizing his accomplishments, generosity, and strength.

Evan Strong grew up with a strong passion for sports. Whether it was surfing the waves in Maui or skateboarding around the neighborhood, you could not find him without a board in his hand. Unfortunately, shortly before his 18th birthday, Evan, on his motorcycle, was struck head-on by a drunk driver. Three days later, his left leg was amputated.

Today, 10 years after his accident, Evan remains the most dominant athlete on the adaptive snowboarding circuit.

Evan's story of overcoming adversity is an inspiration to California and to athletes all across the country. By turning an obstacle into opportunity, he has earned every title in the sport of adaptive boardercross, including a Winter X Games gold medal, a world championship title, two overall titles, and 11 world cup titles.

Perhaps most extraordinary, his historic performance in the 2014